



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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I fear, for the majority of these children, and, perhaps, not needed until they have learnt to look at what can be seen by the normal eye, and at all hours of outdoor life.

III. And, lastly, aid can be given by those who will speak to Mothers' Meetings and at Co-operative Guild gatherings on Nature and her study. If we could get the mothers of the industrial classes interested in the ideas and ideals of this Union, it would be a great stimulus to the children. Too often feeble tales and mild morality are offered at these meetings to women whose intelligence has been quickened by life's teaching, even if their stock of knowledge is scant, whereas talk about their children's characters, reference to habits familiar, but not hitherto thought important, reminders of the influence of Nature on their own lives, suggestions of possibilities for their families, would, it is believed, awaken in them new powers of observation and open new sources of information. This, however, is a big subject, and already this letter is long. I have written it to show one of the many ways by which the children of the poor may be introduced to "Mother Nature." The importance of doing so will be obvious to those who themselves find joy and rest in her friendship, and know that their neighbours, the poor, are among those who, even more than most people, need such joy and such rest—

"In Nature's lap the sad find hope."

I am, dear editor,

Yours very truly,

Warden's Lodge, Toynbee Hall,
Whitechapel, London, *July*, 1900.

HENRIETTA O. BARNETT.

THE PARENTS' REVIEW

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE
OF HOME-TRAINING AND CULTURE.

"Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, a life."

"CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME."

A STUDY OF BROWNING'S POETIC METHOD.*

BY W. BLAKE ODGERS, M.A., LL.D., Q.C.

SOME poets have an epic talent; they can tell a story well. They usually begin at the beginning, come gradually on to the middle, and then progress steadily to the end. They state all the facts as they occurred, in strict chronological order; and so give us an orderly narrative, clear and simple, such as any child can understand. And yet there is plenty of room for any amount of beautiful description, of sparkling conversation, and every kind of poetic embellishment. In most cases these "epic" poets, if I may call them so, tell us their story *ab extra*, from the outside. They describe everything as it would appear to a bystander who saw the occurrences really happening before his eyes; or as spectators in a theatre see the drama acted before them. We see what the characters do, we hear what they say, and from what they do and say we gather what is passing in their minds.

But this is not Robert Browning's method. What especially interested him was the working of the human heart, and the effect of external circumstances on the character and soul of man. He peers beneath external appearances, and ever asks himself, Given such and such a

* A lecture given to the Finchley Branch of the P.N.E.U.

set of circumstances, how would a man or woman act, so placed? What permanent or transitory effect would these external matters produce within? He does not, as a rule, care to describe what anyone can see for himself. He was gifted with the highest and quickest power of discernment; and his desire always was to probe beneath the surface, and to show his readers something that is not obvious to the casual bystander. Hence nearly all Browning's poems are written in the first person. He makes the man disclose his own character and purposes, reveal himself, in fact. And this result follows—that it is next door to impossible for him to tell the story in strict chronological order. It is not often that a man when communing with himself goes steadily through the long chain of events and circumstances which brought him to this pass. He throws out an allusion now and then to the acts done by other persons in the story; but such allusions are more in the nature of comments on their conduct than an accurate description of what they really did. Men and women, as a rule, do not sit down by themselves and go *seriatim* through the whole of a long story with which they are already perfectly familiar.

Sometimes this difficulty is removed by introducing a second person, a kind of attendant Boswell, with a spice of Paul Pry in him, who "wants to know all about it." This affords an excuse for a more or less orderly narration of the facts. Thus seven friends call on Fust the Printer. Or the Pope in the "Ring and the Book" is supposed to have certain Cardinals and others present, who are interested to hear the view he takes of Guido's crime. So, too, we have sometimes a priest at the confessional, hearing the story of crime, or a grandfather repeating to his grandchildren a legend of his youth. Martin Relph, like the Ancient Mariner, seems to think he has a right to stop any casual wayfarer, and make him listen to the whole story, and then to call on him to say whether Martin Relph when a boy was a murderer or only a coward—an awkward question, indeed, for the casual wayfarer to have to decide. But in all these cases there is still much the same difficulty. We begin at the end, and then hark back to the more or less distant past, which is the beginning of the story. It is difficult to keep to strict chronological order, whenever the hero of the tale is himself the person speaking.

And yet, after all, is not the introspective method—the making a man reveal his own soul—a higher and deeper and nobler kind of poetry than the mere epic description of things as seen? Take such a picture as Frith's "Derby Day," or his "Railway Station." The canvas is crowded with figures, each of which one might see any day on Epsom Downs or at Waterloo. It is lifelike, full of interest and of incident, but is it the highest art? So there is a recent well-known picture with Jesus at the left being led away to crucifixion, with Pontius Pilate in the centre washing his hands before the people, and Barabbas on the right hand being released, with glad surprise in his eyes, and welcomed by his friends. A beautiful and a comprehensive picture, and one that tells its story infallibly to the million. But if an artist could draw us just the face of Christ and nothing more, and paint it so that we could read in his eyes the infinite love and the infinite sorrow, if a painter could paint it so that any one looking into those eyes could read there the story of the noblest self-sacrifice in human history, would not that be the truer and higher art?

No doubt this poetry written from the "inside," so to speak, is not so easy to follow and understand as poems which are thrown into the form of connected narrative and deal with external matters only. The reader misses his prologue. He is startled by being plunged at once *in medias res*. When he comes across a poem beginning thus:—

"You're my friend;
I was the man the Duke spoke to,"

he feels inclined to cry out, "Here stop a bit: who's whose friend, and why did what Duke speak to him?" He wants a kind of "Argument," such as used to be prefixed to each book of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. You can see the kind of thing in any issue of these local daily papers that publish novels at the rate of a column a day. The Editor kindly inserts in front of Chapter VII. a brief *resumé* of Chapters I. to VI. for the benefit of the casual purchaser of an isolated copy. But with Browning we plunge at once into Chapter VII., and we have to pick up the facts of the six lost chapters as best we can! I do not say that Browning invariably adopts the method which I have described. When he is writing a story for a child, such as *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, he does not. But it is his usual method and it puzzles the uninitiated.

Now contrast Tennyson with Browning. Take any well-known poem of his; for instance, "The Revenge." The late Laureate begins at the beginning:—

"At Flores in the Azores Sir Richard Grenville lay,
And a pinnacle, like a fluttered bird, came flying from far away.
'Spanish ships of war at sea! we have sighted fifty-three,'"

and so on. Then there is a discussion, "Shall we fight or shall we fly?" "Then swear Lord Thomas Howard." "Then spake Sir Richard Grenville." And then the men of Bideford in Devon are carried on board "very carefully and slow" while Lord Howard sails away

"with five ships of war that day
Till he melted like a cloud in the silent summer heaven."

Each step in the story is described in strict sequence, just as it occurred, just as though an accurate reporter had been present and had taken down exactly what everybody said and did. For, mark you, no hint is given us as to what anybody thought, except in so far as we gather it from what they said and did. That is just like real life. The master gunner may have thought that it was very foolish of Sir Richard to order him to blow up the ship. No doubt some mournful recollection of his wife and babes at home passed through the gunner's mind. But we are not allowed to learn his thoughts. The poets only tells us that "the gunner said, 'Ay! Ay!'" And this again is just like real life. If you or I had been on the deck of "The Revenge," all that we should have seen would have been that gunner pulling his forelock, and all we should have heard would have been the words, "Ay, Ay."

But if Robert Browning had essayed to write a poem on the loss of "The Revenge," a very different method would have been employed. He would have begun at the end. We should have Sir Richard Grenville soliloquizing on board the Spanish flagship. The poem would have opened abruptly, something like this, perhaps:—

"Here I, Sir Richard Grenville, lie!
Here on Spanish deck I die!
And these Spanish curs stand round,
With their courtesies profound.
Gr-r-r-, you swine!"

Then we should have had his views on death and eternity, a frank exposition of the simple faith of an Elizabethan

Puritan, intermingled with a wholesome hatred of Spain. Then his views as to the conduct of his men in surrendering the ship, contrary to his orders. These would have come in for some good round abuse. Then about the middle of the poem would come the first allusion to Lord Thomas Howard, and just before the conclusion of the poem it would be mentioned, probably, for the first time, that there had been a sea-fight of an unusual kind between one little English ship and fifty-three Spanish galleons!

Now take the poem of "Childe Roland," which is generally regarded as one of the most difficult and incomprehensible of Browning's poems. It certainly is one of the most "Browningesque" of his poems. It contains all his most striking characteristics, good and bad; and therefore serves well as an example of his peculiar style and method. One reason certainly why so many readers have found difficulty in understanding this poem is because they have not appreciated Browning's peculiar method of "getting behind the scenes," so to speak, and making the hero himself disclose his own mind. The story only leaks out incidentally, and is regarded by the poet as quite subsidiary to the development of the mental picture. And there is a second reason; because so many people, instead of honestly trying to find out for themselves what a poet means, will read books and essays in which other people no more capable than themselves state what they conceive to be the meaning of the poem. Men and women in this nineteenth century are far too fond of reading about a poem instead of studying the poem itself. To understand Browning is worth an effort; he does not "wear his heart upon his sleeve for the daws to peck at." But you must make the effort yourself. It will do you little good to have the solution pointed out to you by any lecturer or lawyer!

And the commentators have gone very far afield indeed over this particular poem. Some will have it that "Childe Roland" is an allegory of life; others are equally positive that it is an allegory of death; while some say that it is an exact and brilliant picture of the sensations which pass through a man's mind just as he is becoming insane! Whereas the poem is no allegory at all; and its hero was as sane as you or I; and the meaning is not far to seek, when once you have mastered Browning's *modus operandi*.

Once more let us contrast Browning's poetic method with Tennyson's. Suppose Tennyson had been reading his *King Lear* and had lit suddenly on that line from an old ballad which lies in the midst of the wild ramblings of "Poor Tom" like a jewel on a dung-hill—

"Childe Rowland to the dark Tower came";

and suppose further that the beauty of this isolated fragment had so wrought on Tennyson's mind that he felt compelled to write a poem upon it. In all probability the line would never have suggested to his mind the same thoughts as arose in Browning's, so that his poem would have borne no resemblance whatever to Browning's startling composition which bears this line as its title. But kindly assume that the same thoughts and the same story would occur to Tennyson when he read that line as did in fact occur to Browning. How would he have set about telling us the tale that Browning tells? What would have been the late Laureate's poetic method? First, we should have had, no doubt, some account of the Dark Tower—a description of "the round squat turret" with no window in it, "built of brown stone"—some description too, of the surrounding scenery. Then the Laureate would give us some inkling what was wrong with this Tower, what princess was immured in it, or what it was that knights should ride to seek there. Then would come a brilliant description of the gallant band of noble "knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed their steps." We should see them starting on their sacred quest, riding two and two, each with a blazoned baldric, and a gemmy bridle glittering free, each with the sunlight on his broad, clear brow, while his bridle bells ring merrily; and sweet looks and favours and "perfume and flowers fall in showers" from the hands of the ladies who watch the departure of the cavalcade. Next would follow the details of their wanderings and adventures. Cuthbert would be the hero first, with his ruddy face and locks of curly gold, a universal favourite; and then his fall after one night's disgrace. Next, Giles would be the leader of the band,—Giles, the soul of honour.

"What honest men should dare (he said) he durst."

And then his treachery, his detection, his execution. And so one by one the knights fall away from the quest which they have taken up and sworn to follow. Some die, some marry, some go astray, and at last "Childe Roland" is left alone,

doggedly persevering in the task to which he had set his soul—his search drawn out through years of world-wide wandering—all hope dwindled into a ghost—yet he keeps on undismayed. And then we should have the last adventure; his sudden lighting on the Tower; the blowing on the horn at sunset; the answer to its echoing peal:

"High on a nightblack horse, in nightblack arms,
With white breastbone and barren ribs of death,
In the half-light—thro' the dim dawn—advanced
The monster, and then paused, and spake no word."

And then the final contest, the victory, or defeat.

But with Browning all this is different. Fierce and abrupt the poem begins:—

"My first thought was, he lied in every word,
That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
Askance to watch the workings of his lie
On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
Suppression of the glee, that pursed and scored
Its edge at one more victim gained thereby."

No doubt such a beginning is somewhat bewildering. This is shown by the great variety of startling conjectures made by men whom we have no other reason for deeming insane. They have been sorely puzzled over this cripple in the road, and hazard the wildest suggestions as to his personality and significance; whereas, in truth, he signifies nothing more than just what Browning tells us. He was merely a man who happened to be there, who knew the way to the Dark Tower, who truthfully imparted this information to the hero of the poem, and was tacitly abused for his pains. Yet some writers maintain that he is Father Time, because, forsooth, he is groundlessly suspected of being about to write an epitaph! Others say he is Saturn, others deem him Death, though he is not provided with a scythe. These dear critics seem to imagine that, because the poem opens with him, he must have some deep undiscovered meaning, which will prove the key-note to the whole poem. But this is not Browning's method. He does not open his opera with an overture which contains hints of all the leading airs to come. The cripple has no more to do with the real latent meaning of the poem than the words, "You're my friend," explain the secret of the Flight of the Duchess.

But who is Childe Roland? Well, to begin with, he is not Charlemagne's Roland; he is not Roland the paladin of

France, whose castle stands at Rolandseck, above the Isle of Nonnenwerth, in "the broad and broadening Rhine." That Roland was not a "Childe." A "childe" is a young man who has performed all knightly exercises, who is every way fitted to be made a knight, but who first must "win his spurs." Thus the Black Prince was a "childe" on the morning of the battle of Cressy. Such a title is wholly inapplicable to the nephew of Charlemagne, the doughty champion equal in prowess to Oliver, the Warden of the Breton marches, the general who commanded the rear-guard in Charlemagne's disastrous flight from Saragossa in A.D. 778. We all know the story; how, as the Frankish army retreated, the Basques rose against them among the Pyrenees, and surprised the rear-guard, and Roland blew his horn for help. But Ganelon, the traitor, the enemy of Roland, persuaded Charlemagne that Roland needed no help; he was but hunting the red deer. And then the pursuing Saracens came up, and joined the Basques in the attack; and again Roland blew his horn, and still no help came. And Roland fought the Basques and the Moors together all that day long, and beat them off at last; but all his men were slain, and he himself was sorely wounded and left alone to die. And he tried to break his magic sword Durendal against the rocks, lest the Moors should get it; but the good sword cut through the rocks and would not break; so he flung it in the stream at Roncesvalles. And he blew his horn the third time, and no help came; so he laid him down to die. Perhaps this notion of the hero dying in solitude may have had some unconscious bearing on Browning's poem. But this Roland, so dear to Taillefer and the Troubadours, to Pulci, Boiardo, and Ariosto, is not the Childe Roland known to Shakespeare's boyhood. For the real Roland, of whom Edgar sang in *King Lear*, was no Frenchman; he was English bred and born, or at least of Celtic race. You will find the whole story in Jamieson's *Illustrations of Northern Antiquities*, in the form of a ballad that he learnt from a Cumberland cobbler. A ballad full of startling interest; for it seems that King Arthur and Queen Guinevere were living at Carlisle—why these thieves of the Border should try to annex our Somersetshire King Arthur, I never can understand, but even the canny Scot claims to place him in Edinburgh—and Guinevere and Arthur have three sons, and one fair daughter,

Burd Helen. This is news indeed! There would never have been any trouble with Lancelot, if only Guinevere had had three lusty boys and one grown-up girl to look after! And the three boys are playing at football under Carlisle Wall, and their sister, as a sister should, is looking on admiringly and "fagging" for them. Then the eldest boy kicked a mighty kick, and the ball flew right over the roof of the church, and Helen ran to fetch it for her brother. But in her haste she ran the wrong way round the end of the church; she ran round it "widdershins," the wrong way of the sun. And we all know that if any one runs round the chancel of a church widdershins, he or she at once falls into the power of the Elfin King! And so it was with Burd Helen; she never came back; and, when her brothers went to look for her, there was the football, but no Burd Helen. What was to be done? Why of course they sought out Merlin and asked his advice. From him they gained the sad intelligence that their sister was no doubt shut up in the green hill of the Elfin King, and they must go and seek her. And then begins the quest. First the elder brother goes, and then the second, but neither obeys to the letter Merlin's minute instructions; and they both, like their sister, fall into the power of the Elfin King. And then at last goes Roland, the youngest of the three; a "childe," not yet a knight; and, like his brothers, he takes ship, and sails across the seas. He does everything that Merlin bade him, and he rescues his sister and his two brothers from the green hill in which they were ensconced. This is obviously a north country ballad. One can tell that from the heroes taking ship. In the legends of Mid-Europe the knights ride and ride for ever through endless gloomy forests. They go everywhere on horseback. But in the ballads of our hardy ancestors your adventurer always takes to the sea; the happy Islands of which he is in quest lie ever across the ocean waves.

And this ballad of Childe Roland was well known in Shakespeare's time. He and many others whom he met at the Rainbow had heard it sung when they were children, and more than one allusion to the tale will be found in the Elizabethan drama. The green hill was somehow changed to a dark Tower, but I cannot tell you when. This was the only Childe Roland at all events that Shakespeare knew. And with this legend in his mind, Browning sits down, not

to write a ballad, not to tell the children a fairy story, but to write an introspective poem. The thing that interests Browning is the state of the man's mind. How would he feel? What would he be thinking of, riding there all alone, the last of the band? He

"had so long suffered in this quest,
Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
So many times among 'The Band'—to wit,
The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed
Their steps—that just to fail as they, seemed best."

Gloomy he would be and morbid to a degree. All the fun and frolic of the quest had vanished; all joyous enterprise had faded out long, long ago; all hope was lost; but there still remained the dogged perseverance and pluck of the genuine Englishman who won't give in when he is beaten. He knows that his comrades all have failed; he knows that he too is almost sure to fail; and yet with set teeth, with purpose unweakened, on he goes steadily to his doom. He had grown suspicious of everyone and everything he meets. He jumps to the conclusion that the cripple, who was guiding him aright, was lying in every word; yet on he goes acquiescingly the way the cripple told him. He hates the sordid country round him; to his gloomy soul Nature wears the gloomy aspect of his own sad thoughts. There never was so wretched and forlorn a tract of land as this through which he rides; or at least to his morbid fancy so it seems; for it is really he who colours the landscape round him. And then he meets a solitary horse

"— one stiff, blind horse . . .
Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe;
I never saw a brute I hated so;
He must be wicked to deserve such pain."

And at the mention of this horse, away fly our dear friends, the critics. Off they go at a tangent! "The poem is an allegory of death: in the Book of Revelation Death sat on 'a pale horse'; and here is the horse!" "No," cry the others, "the poem is an allegory of life; in the Book of Revelation the angel who 'went forth conquering and to conquer' rode on a white horse; and here is the horse!" And this careless Browning never thought of telling us the colour of the forlorn quadruped whom Childe Roland encountered. It might have been a chestnut or a roan!

Moreover this much is certain, that he did not come out of the Bible at all: Browning saw him on the tapestry of a room at Paris, and annexed him for the purposes of this poem.

And on Childe Roland rides, through this desolate country, which owes, no doubt, most of its horrors to his own heated imagination. A sudden little river crosses his path—

"As unexpected as a serpent comes,
So petty yet so spiteful! All along,
Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;
Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
Of mute despair, a suicidal throng!"

Even the trees are tinged with his own morbid gloom!—

"Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,
Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth
Desperate and done with; (so a fool finds mirth,
Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood
Changes and off he goes!) Within a rood,
Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth."

And it is only incidentally that in his self-communing a hint is thrown out, just here and there, from which we learn the story of the Quest, that there had been a band of knights who started to find the Dark Tower, and that all save him had failed. Wearied of all that he can see, he shuts his eyes and turns them on his heart;

"As a man calls for wine before he fights,
I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights,
Ere fitly I could hope to play my part."

But the past has no comfort for him. There is nothing to encourage or to inspire him in the remembrance of the gallant band of knights that started with him on this quest, full of joy and hope. Where are they now? All dead or lost, and some disgraced. Just one stanza is given to Cuthbert, one to Giles. Buried in these gloomy recollections, he rides on, deeming himself to be "just as far as ever from the end." When suddenly comes "a click as when a trap shuts." The quest is over; the moment has come; this is the place; and the man is ready for his task!

"Burningly it came on me all at once,
This is the place! those two hills on the right,
Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight,
While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Duncce,
Dotard, a-doing at the very nonce,
After a life spent training for the sight!"

"What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?
The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
Built of brown stone, without a counterpart
In the whole world

"Not see? because of night, perhaps?—why, day
Came back again for that! before it left,
The dying sunset kindled through a cleft;
The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay,
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay.

"Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled
Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears,
Of all the lost adventurers, my peers,—
How such an one was strong, and such was bold,
And such was fortunate, yet each of old
Lost, lost!—one moment knelled the woe of years.

"There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides, met
To view the last of me, a living frame
For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
I saw them, and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.'"

And there Browning stops. He does not tell us what came out from the Dark Tower in answer to the bugle-call. Was it ogre, gnome, or giant? Was there a fight? and did Childe Roland win, or did he fail like all the lost adventurers, his peers? The poet does not tell us. To him the interest ceases the moment the horn sounds. The period of morbid brooding and inaction is over, and the time for action had come. The mental picture vanishes in the clash of arms. Yet I myself have little doubt that our hero, who had held on his way so many years, undeterred by pain and danger and disappointment, proved himself a man in the encounter, and won his fight with whatever spirit of evil lurked within the Tower.

Or it may be that Browning here would teach us quite a different moral—that if a man pluckily tries to do manfully his best, then, however sad, however lonely, his path in life may be, to that man it matters not whether in the eyes of the world he fail or succeed. In God's eyes he has succeeded; for he has borne his part bravely and done his duty as God willed.

THE EARLY ÆSTHETIC CULTURE OF THE CHILD-MIND.

BY IRENE LANGRIDGE.

THE education of children is a subject which probably never before has occupied the serious attention of parents and guardians to the degree it does to-day. The Greeks, indeed, regarded the subject as of paramount importance, and carefully discerned and directed the means to the achievement of the end—namely, the proportionate development and due balance of the physical and intellectual qualities of man—which was clearly apprehended by them as the ideal good that they desired to result from education. Like wise people, having a precise perception of the goal, they never lost sight of it, and from infancy their male children (we know little of the female ones) were carefully trained with a view to the attainment of this harmoniously proportioned but limited perfection. That the Greek aim was very largely realized we know for two reasons:

(1) The limited and moderate nature of the Hellenic ideal rendered success a practical possibility.

(2) The end desired was no vague generalization, but a point of attainment, accurately determined on beforehand, the means to achieve which were completely adequate.

It is to this second reason that we may attribute the greater part of their success, and I would fain lay stress on the fact that to-day, anxious and preoccupied as we are in a general way with the subject of education, we do not sufficiently define what we desire of it, and even when we *have* a sort of idea, we do not direct the means to its attainment early enough in our children's lives.

Truly it is altogether a harder task for us than it was for the Greeks. The Christian religion, and the tremendous expansion of all branches of human knowledge, have extended our field of vision as *they* could never have imagined. We have lifted up our eyes unto the hills, those blue distant ranges that rise peak upon peak until they fade into the sky